Changing Hands: Art Without Reservation, 3
June 26, 2012 - October 21, 2012

Alan Michelson
Phoenix, 2012
Courtesy of the artist.
Dear Educator,

We are delighted that you have scheduled a visit to Changing Hands: Art Without Reservation 3. When you and your students visit the Museum of Arts and Design, you will be given an informative tour of the exhibition with a museum educator, and then guided through an inspiring hands-on project, which students can take home with them. To make your museum experience more enriching and meaningful, we strongly encourage you to use this packet as a resource, and work with your students in the classroom before and after your museum visit.

This packet includes topics for discussion and activities intended to introduce the key themes and concepts of the exhibition. We suggest writing, storytelling, and art projects that encourage students to explore the ideas from the exhibition in ways that relate directly to their lives and experiences.

Please feel free to adapt and build on these materials, and to use this packet in any way that you wish.

We look forward to welcoming you and your students to the Museum of Arts and Design.

Sincerely,

Cathleen Lewis
Manager of School, Youth and Family Programs
cathleen.lewis@madmuseum.org

Lessons written by Petra Pankow, Museum Educator, in collaboration with the Museum of Arts and Design Education Department.
# Table of Contents

**WELCOME** 1  
**THE MUSEUM OF ARTS AND DESIGN** 3  
**HELPFUL HINTS FOR YOUR MUSEUM VISIT** 4  
*Changing Hands: Art without Reservation* 3  
**EVOLUTION AND EXPLORATION** 6  
**NATURAL SELECTION** 14  
**HISTORICAL PROVOCATION / DECODING HISTORY** 20  
**WEBOGRAPHY** 27
THE MUSEUM OF ARTS AND DESIGN has served as an international resource center for arts, craft, and design since 1956. Through its collections, exhibitions, programs, and publications, the Museum serves as a forum for critical debate concerning the nature of craftsmanship and the process that links materials, techniques, forms, patterns, and concepts in all creative work.

HOW DOES A MUSEUM WORK?

Administration: This team, led by the Director of the Museum, determines the programs, plans, and philosophy of the Museum. It also raises funds to realize the Museum’s goals, and works directly with the Board of Governors, who guide the Museum’s functions.

Curatorial: This is the team, led by the Chief Curator, that collaborates to decide which exhibits will be shown, how they will look, what artwork they will include, and how they are to be interpreted.

Registration: Led by the Registrar, this team arranges the safe handling of art to be placed in an exhibition, and maintains the permanent collections acquired by the Museum.

Education: This team provides the interactive interpretation of the objects on view through educational programs designed for children, adults, and families who visit the Museum.

Facility Maintenance: This is the team that allows the day-to-day operations of the Museum to continue, from turning the lights on to ensuring the safety of all who enter the building.

Security Guards: This is the team most often seen in the Museum, because its main task is to protect the artwork from harm so that future visitors will be able to see the same objects as visitors see today. Guards also are helpful in answering visitors’ questions.

Museums are places where we can learn about the past, present, and future of the world around us. The diversity of knowledge that visitors can gather from museums is endless, especially when they form the habit of museum exploration at an early age. We look forward to welcoming your group into our galleries.
HELPFUL HINTS FOR YOUR MUSEUM VISIT

“I try, when I go to museums, to do two things. One, to appreciate what I’m looking at, just to see it, but then to isolate a few pieces that I really look at in detail. I study and I draw not with any purpose in mind. I mean, I don't go looking for specific things. I just try to be open-minded and keep my eyes open. It's interesting that every time I go back to the same place, I see something different.” Arline M. Fisch (1931-) Brooklyn, New York

While visiting the exhibition try to use all your senses. Notice the way the pieces are displayed. Are there any specific groupings of pieces you can distinguish? If you enjoy looking at one piece more than others, can you explain why?

Here are some questions and suggestions of things to think about as you move around the exhibition:

I. What can be objectively observed?
   a. What is the physical description of the artwork? Measurement, weight, materials used, articulation of materials…
   b. What iconography, if any, is used? Designs, words, diagrams…
   c. What are the object’s formal design characteristics? Consider lines, shapes, forms, color, texture…

II. What would it be like to interact with this piece of art? How would you handle, lift, display it?
   a. How would the piece of art feel, move, and sound?
   b. What does the piece do? Does the piece have a function? How would the figures move if they were alive?
   c. What is our emotional response to this piece? Fear, joy, indifference, curiosity, revulsion, excitement?

III. What is in the mind of the artist? What are the viewers thinking and feeling? Use creative imagining and free association.
   a. Review all of the above information and consider what was going on in the world when the work was produced to develop possible interpretations of the piece. (Theories and hypotheses.)
   b. If there are figures, do they tell a story? Does the piece have underlying political or social meaning? (Understanding and visual thinking.)
   c. Develop a program to investigate the questions posed by the material evidence. (Program of research.)

IV. Brainstorm about an event or situation that is currently happening in your life that you could animate into one scene or that could be made into your very own figurative sculpture. (Design themes,)
CHANGING HANDS: ART WITHOUT RESERVATION 3

Contemporary Native North American Art
From the Northeast and Southeast

June 26 – October 21, 2012
EVOLUTION AND EXPLORATION

The title of this exhibition series, Changing Hands, suggests that cultural heritage is passed down from generation to generation. Many Native artists use materials and processes that are deeply rooted in their cultures. At the same time, as contemporary artists working in a rapidly evolving world, they take a new, highly innovative look at artistic traditions. The resulting works, while using the past as a point of departure, reinterpret history and tradition in fascinating new ways. The most traditional of materials, skills, and techniques, such as beadwork, weaving, and stone carving, often undergo radical transformations in the hands of this new generation of practitioners. Through such transformations, these artists challenge stereotypical Western notions of Native American art and take an important step towards overcoming limitations set by a Eurocentric art establishment. Their work is guiding Western viewers away from the assumption of simple artisanship, and has gained a more central place on the American contemporary art map.

Some general questions about the artworks in this section:

- What materials does the artist use?
- What processes and skills might he or she have used in the making of this work?
- Which of these materials and techniques are rooted in Native American culture? (Think about whether you have seen a traditional work using these materials and, if so, describe it.)
- In what way does the piece relate to contemporary culture, especially in terms of materials or techniques?
- In what way does the content of the work relate to traditional Native American culture?
- In what way does the content of the work relate to current issues?
- Write a one-paragraph statement summarizing how the artwork joins past, present, and future.
Cody E. Harjo
(b. 1981, Ada, Oklahoma; lives in Brooklyn, New York)
*Kotcha Faces Climate Change*, 2008
Italian wool, cotton, glass beads, acrylic yarn, satin ribbon, cotton thread
38 1/2 x 13 1/2 in. (97.8 x 34.3 cm)
Courtesy of the artist
LOOK:

Take a moment to closely study this object, then start describing it.

• What is the overall shape of this object?
• What shapes, patterns, or ornaments do you notice?
• How are they arranged? How do they relate to one another?
• Describe the large triangular image at the bottom in as much detail as possible.

THINK ABOUT:

• Do you think this object has a practical purpose (function)? Please explain.
• What is the relationship between the function of the object and the fact that it tells a story? What other mediums (materials and processes) can artists use to tell stories?

Cody E. Harjo, who created this work, is a self-taught contemporary beadwork artist. The stepdaughter of a master Seminole patchwork artist, she uses her own artistic practice to give a new spin to traditional Seminole crafts. In this updated version of a Seminole bandolier bag, she combines traditional beading with 21st-century social commentary. Elaborately decorated bandolier shoulder bags are common in many Native Cultures, from the Great Lakes and Midwestern prairies to Florida. Featuring a wide beaded strap (in this case, the symbols signify wind, lightning, snakes, and alligators), bandolier bags were typically worn by men who either acquired them by trade or as war trophies. Though sometimes used to carry belongings, they were mostly worn for show, signaling the status and wealth of their wearers.

DISCUSS:

• The triangular picture on Harjo’s bag tells an elaborate story. Who are the characters in this story?
• What can you say about the location of the story?
• What message do you think the artist wants to convey?
• In your opinion, who is this message addressed to? Please explain your answer.

Here is how the Brooklyn-based artist describes what is going on in the image:
“Kotcha” is the Muscogee word for cat. I am Kotcholgi, or Panther Clan, and this bag is a record of the climate change occurring in the world of a “Kotcha” living in New York City. “Kotcha” moves through the city, aware that something is amiss, but the current solution is simply to open an umbrella and keep moving. Above the New York City skyline, the elements of severe weather are at play. Two water birds, prayer birds, represent the Two Towers. The time of the polar bear may [be] at an end, which is why he walks in the opposite direction. “Kotcha,” however, walks toward change, as a windmill churns in the distance. Meanwhile the tiny turtle holds up the world.

1

• What is the artist’s position toward climate change? Does she offer a neutral, pessimistic or optimistic perspective on the issue? Please discuss your answer with your classmates.
• Discuss how Harjo’s work combines Native American tradition and contemporary themes.
• How does one influence the other? For example, in what way does the idea of climate change appear in a different light when played out a beaded design rather than, say, a news photo?

COMPARE:

Mindy Laureen Magyar uses traditional Micmac techniques, designs, and materials in her work exploring “the inherent meaning of utilitarian objects.” Changing Hands 3 features a shell chair by Ray and Charles Eames, an icon of mid-century American design, which the artist embellished with elaborate beadwork. Compare and contrast Magyar’s work with Harnjo’s beaded bag. Please focus on the relationship both objects place between:

• Past and present.
• Native and Western culture.
• Form and function (the way the piece looks vs. its practical purpose).

Mindy Laureen Magyar
(b. 1975, Mountain Lakes, New Jersey; lives in Washington, DC)
Chair, 2010
Charles Eames *Shell Chair* frame, canvas, cotton, and rayon thread, rubber
22 x 19 x 32 in. (55.9 x 48.3 x 81.3 cm)
Courtesy of the artist
Sarah Sense  
(b. 1980, Sacramento, California; lives between Sacramento, California, and Santiago, Chile) 
*Weaving the Americas, Panajachel*, 2011  
Digital photographs, photo, silkscreen prints, tape  
47 x 71 in. (119.4 x 180.3 cm)  
Courtesy of the artist
Look:

Take an extended look at this image and describe what you see.

- Describe the shapes and patterns you notice.
- What do you observe about the use of color in the work?
- Can you make out any figurative imagery? Please describe all the things you can clearly identify.
- Why is it difficult to make sense of some parts of the image?
- How many layers can you make out?
- What materials did the artist use?
- What technique/s did she use to combine them?

Think About:

Sarah Sense created this image by using traditional Chitimacha basketry techniques to weave photographs and screen prints. For her Weaving the Americas series, she has travelled throughout North, Central, and South America in order to research contemporary Indigenous arts. Panajachel, named for a town in Guatemala, is part of the many works that resulted from this journey.

- In what way does Sarah Sense combine tradition and contemporary (pop) culture in her work? Consider materials, techniques, etc.
- Where do local and global culture intersect in the work?
- In terms of the work’s message, do you think the artist succeeds in creating a deep connection between past and present? Please explain.

Sarah Sense describes her artistic practice as follows:

After researching the history of Chitimacha basket weaving, I was inspired to continue the tradition of my ancestors. In 2004, the chairman of the Chitimacha Tribe of Louisiana gave me permission to use nontraditional material in weaving our basket patterns, and since then I have incorporated photographic images into my work. I began by weaving reservation landscapes. The images evolved as I incorporated Hollywood posters, family photo archives, and my personas of “The Cowgirl” and “The Indian Princess.” Most recent bodies of work are photos woven over photo silkscreen prints.2

DISCUSS:

Weaving, as a way of layering of one strip of material onto another, allows for some areas of the work to be visible, while others are covered. The work is multilayered, both literally and figuratively.

- Discuss the ways in which Sense takes advantage of this fact, and how it influences the appearance of her work.
- In what way does this interplay of revealing and concealing make the work more expressive?
- Sense’s use of color, line, and layers lends the work a dynamic feeling of movement. Imagine a soundtrack for the work, and come up with an evocative title.

DO:

Think about a topic/issue that is important to you, and find related printed materials (e.g., newspaper/magazine pages, photographs, or handwritten pages). Based on Sarah Sense’s work, combine your materials by weaving them together. Start by cutting your pages and photos into strips of equal or varying width, and create a simple weave. You can also include collage techniques, for example by gluing paper strips on top of solid paper pages. Explore patterns and the relationship between intact and fragmented imagery.
NATURAL SELECTION

Across time and space, nature has been a profound inspiration for artists. Many stories and myths use natural phenomena as their points of departure, in an attempt to make sense of the world and human life within it. The material cultures of indigenous societies are particularly identified with the use of natural materials. Long before glass beads and cotton fabric found their way into the manufacture of Native American artifacts by trade, American Indian artists used animal skin, sinew, porcupine quills, feathers, and natural dyes in the production of beautifully crafted everyday and ritual objects. This tradition is upheld by some of the artists in the exhibition, who draw from the natural environment for materials used in their work. Others have moved on to more contemporary materials and processes, but maintain a strong interest in stories and myths that take their cues from the natural world to explain universal questions about individual and communal experience, forming the foundation for spiritual beliefs.

Some general questions about the artworks in this section:

- What is the role of nature in the work, both in terms of materials and content?
- What mythical stories does it refer to?
- What techniques does the artist use to make these myths come alive?
- How does the relationship between humans and their natural environment play out in the work?
- In what way do artists use nature to engage the viewer?
Luzene Hill
(b. 1946, Atlanta, Georgia; lives in Whittier, North Carolina)
*Becoming*, 2011 (detail)
Beeswax, silk
Dimensions variable
Courtesy of the artist
LOOK:

Take a close look at the image above, which is a photograph of a three-dimensional artwork.

• What different elements are integrated to make this work?
• How are they combined? What is their relationship to one another?
• What do these elements depict?
• What colors do you notice? Are they evenly spread out or are they concentrated in certain areas?
• What materials did the artist use to make this work?
• The bodies are sculpted out of beeswax. Is there a relationship between material and content?
• How does the artist create meaning through the use of materials?

THINK ABOUT:

• What story do you think the artist is trying to convey in this work?
• How does the artist play with the idea of movement?

Luzene Hill's work Becoming is part of a series probing Native American myths about the constellations. The highly narrative works share the common theme of children, often adolescent girls, who are drawn up into the night sky, where they gradually transform themselves into stars. Hill was particularly interested in the Pleiades constellation, which "has inspired myths that span cultures around the world. In the Northern Hemisphere this constellation was particularly important for agrarian societies, being observed most clearly in the spring when it was time to plant and in the fall at harvesttime. Star stories created familial connections to a higher power—one that clearly guided people and was crucial to survival."3

• How does Hill bring the idea of humans becoming stars to life?
• Think about the connection between constellations and community and family ties. How do they relate to each other, and what do these relationships tell us about the way we make sense of the world?

DISCUSS:

Nature has always served as an important inspiration for artists, all over the world and during every historical period. In myths and spiritual practices, natural phenomena have served to explain the world and its relationship to human life.

3 Changing Hands 3, p. 154.
• As a group, discuss the role of nature in Luzene Hill’s work, both in terms of materials and content.
• How does the artist combine individual elements to create meaning beyond what is directly visible?
• In what way does the work go beyond ideas of the natural world?

**D O :**

Think about a story or myth to which you feel a particular connection. Identify the characters, the place, or any important objects in the story. Think about which of these elements you would need to recreate the myth visually, so that most people could identify the story (for example, Hansel, Gretel, the witch, and the gingerbread house in the case of one popular fairy tale). Using modeling clay, paper, and any readily available found objects (e.g., wood, fabric, felt, wire, bottle caps, corks), shape the characters and objects from your story. Finally, use string and wire to combine them into a mobile that can be hung from the ceiling. Go around the classroom and discuss each of the stories your classmates recreated.

**C O M P A R E :**

Luzene Hill’s work relates to two other suspended sculptures in the exhibition: Hannah Claus’s *Birds* and David Hannan’s *Untitled*, which are reproduced below with statements by their respective artists. One way to do the comparison and contrast is to form research groups devoted to each individual work. After each group provides a short report on its assigned artwork, start a general discussion about the three works’ similarities and differences.

• Compare and contrast all three works, considering both their formal characteristics (materials, processes, appearance) and the narratives they construct.
• How do they relate to the natural world?
• As works of installation art, how do they engage the viewer?
• Discuss the different notions of community in each work.
• Time and its passing (or stillness) is a theme in all three works. Discuss how notions of time unfold in each of them.
Hannah Claus
(b. 1969, Fredericton, New Brunswick; lives in Montreal, Quebec)
_Birds_, 2012
Double-matte polyester film, digital photographs, cotton thread, glue, wood
64 x 48 x 48 in. (162.6 x 121.9 x 121.9 cm)
Courtesy of the artist

_I have been thinking of clouds in my work for a few years now—shifting structures of mist suspended in the atmosphere, in which so many individual droplets come together to form a whole. The idea of a cloud holds many possibilities. I see a link to molecules and molecular activity. I relate to the sky as a site of creativity and cerebral activity, transformation and change. It is something that I see as a means of expressing connections between self and other, the material and immaterial. My personal association stems from the Haudenauonee creation teaching of Sky Woman who fell from her world onto the back of a turtle. Clouds suggest community, memory, and the transience of time. This particular installation references the moment in the story when the waterfowl rise up to catch Sky Woman and break her fall._

---

The hunt, the carnival, the circus, the domestic realm—my pieces explore each of these themes. Traditionally, a taxidermy form is used in making a hunter’s trophy. The skin of the slain animal is stretched over the form and becomes a celebration of human power over nature. In my work, however, instead of using animal skin, I transform the taxidermy form into a new hybrid by combining animals and elements of nature. They might be left bare or completely covered with a lightweight packing tape that creates a glasslike vessel of the animal, making the form seem fragile. This technique in turn takes the power away from the trophy and makes the animal more vulnerable to the viewer. The large packing-tape work uses life-sized coyote forms with branch tails. Suspended from ceiling to floor, it represents a twisted merry-go-round or chandelier, representative of the carnival world and the domestic interior. The coyote may be both at play or at war with its habitat over the same space. The large size of the work also competes with the viewer’s space, adding to the tension.5

5 Changing Hands 3, p. 152.
HISTORICAL PROVOCATION / DECODING HISTORY

This section features artists who are interested in social and political issues, such as the construction of history and the ways in which notions of the past are stored in a mainstream collective memory. By probing into the historically fraught relationship between Americans and the indigenous population of a country colonized by a foreign power, these artists shed light on the mechanisms by which stereotypes are constructed. Using a wide range of media, old and new, they examine the relationship between past and present from individual and communal perspectives, shedding light on more universal questions of cultural identity. Skillfully employing wit, humor, and keen observation, their works challenge viewers to re-examine their own notions of the past and how it has shaped the present.

Some general questions about the artworks in this section:

• What is the artist’s perspective on history?
• What medium does the artist employ to bring across his/her viewpoint?
• How does the medium further the message?
• In what ways does the work raise issues of cultural and/or individual identity?
• Does the work thematize historical/cultural stereotypes? In what ways?
• What alternatives to these stereotypes does the artist offer?
• Is he or she making a compelling argument? Please explain.
Skawennati
b. 1969, Kahnawake, Quebec; lives in Montreal, Quebec
Hunter Mega-Figurine (prototype), 2012
Powdered plaster composite produced with color 3D Printer
12 x 6 1/2 x 6 1/2 in. (30.5 x 16.5 x 16.5 cm)
Courtesy of the artist
LOOK:

Take a good look at the figurine above and describe it in as much detail as possible.

• What do you notice about the person’s attire and hairstyle? Try to mention every single detail.
• What attitude do his posture and facial expression convey?
• What sort of person do you think he is? Please explain your answer based on your observations.

THINK ABOUT:

• Does the figure remind you of a character you have encountered in your own experience (e.g., books, movies, or toys)? In what ways is it similar or different?
• Have you ever played with action figures? What do you find appealing about them, or more generally, why do you think kids like to play with them?
• In your opinion, is there something to be learned through this sort of play? Please explain.

This figurine is part of a multi-component project by Montreal-based artist Skawennati. TimeTraveller™ includes a website, a ten-episode machinima series (in progress), a prototype action figure, and a forthcoming Alternate Reality Game. The hero of the story is Hunter, a young Mohawk man. Living in 2112, he uses an “edutainment” system called TimeTraveller™ to reconnect to the past and his ancestors during any historical period he chooses. You can see the first four videos of the series at Skawenneti’s website: www.timetravellertm.com.

DISCUSS:

The theme of time travel evokes the idea that history, like the present, is always seen through an individual or communal perspective. The belief that there is no absolute truth about the past becomes clear in a quote from the series’ first episode: “If there’s one thing every Indian knows: when it comes to history, always get a second opinion.”

• Please discuss this statement with your classmates.
• Why is this something that Native Americans should be particularly concerned about?
• If you were to travel to a moment in the past, what would it be? Why would you want to revisit this particular era or event?
• What do you think you might find out by interacting with the historical characters you might meet on your trip?
DO :

With a partner, research an event from Native American history and write a brief summary. One of you will take on the role of a European settler, the other, that of an American Indian. Draw a three-to five-panel comic strip about this event.

Alan Michelson (b. 1953, Buffalo, New York; lives in New York, New York)
Phoenix, 2012
Handmade paper, archival board and ink, wood, 19 x 17 1/4 x 31 1/2 in. (48.3 x 43.8 x 80 cm)
Courtesy of the artist
LOOK:

Study the object above closely, then share what you notice with the rest of your class:

• What is the overall shape of the work?
• More specifically, what sort of building is it? Please list everything you notice about it.
• What is it made out of? What else do you notice about the material?
• How do you think the artist constructed this object?
• What do you notice about the surface design of the building?
• What different sorts of writing do you notice?
• Can you come up with a title for the work?

THINK ABOUT:

• The curators of Changing Hands 3 chose this work to be featured in the “Historical Provocations / Decoding History” section of the exhibition. Based on your observations so far, what might the work’s connection be to the broader theme of history?
• Make a list of questions you have about the work, then exchange notes with a partner and discuss. The goal is less to find absolute answers than to continue looking closely at the work while thinking about its possible meanings.
**DISCUSS:**

*Phoenix* is based on the log print shop in New Echota, Georgia, where the *Cherokee Phoenix*, the first Native American newspaper, was published by the Cherokee Nation. New Echota, Georgia was the capital of the Cherokee Nation from 1825 until their forced removal in the 1830s. The artist statement offers crucial insights into the story that inspired Michelson to create the work:

The model is imprinted with text from the December 17, 1831 edition of the newspaper, which [...] describes events leading up the forced relocation of Cherokee under the official U.S. policy of Indian Removal. The Cherokee Nation had selectively adapted to modernity in significant ways, with large prosperous farms, a written constitution, judicial system, and police force, as well as a higher rate of literacy than their non-Native neighbors. They exhausted every political and legal means to retain their lands, and were eventually ousted after a series of legal, legislative, and executive maneuvers by the state of Georgia, the Supreme Court, Congress, and President Andrew Jackson.

The unauthorized Treaty of New Echota in 1835—printed on the roof of the model—was the basis for the later U.S. Army–directed removal of some 12,000 Cherokees at gunpoint, known as the Trail of Tears. Perhaps as many as a quarter of them perished in the brutal forced march to the Indian Territory (present-day Oklahoma). The *Cherokee Phoenix* continues to publish today and is available on the Internet and on iPhone.⁶

- Architectural structures, like writing systems, are important symbols of civilization. Discuss how these symbols intersect and collide with one another in the artwork *Phoenix*.
- Discuss how the work confronts the denial of human rights to the Cherokee Indians?
- Does the work challenge long-held stereotype about Native Americans? How?
- In your opinion, does the artist manage to engage viewers as he also mines history to uncover the story of the Trail of Tears?
- Does the work sway previously held beliefs? Please explain your answers.
- Have students research the Treaty of New Echota, and then ask groups to report to the rest of the class: How was the Treaty of New Echota unauthorized? How did the U.S. Government justify the removal and resettlement of the Cherokees? How many Cherokees perished in the resettlement? What was the benefit to the U.S. Government and the settlers?

---

⁶ *Changing Hands* 3, p. 162.
WEBOGRAPHY

Hannah Claus
http://hannahclaus.blogspot.com/

David Hannan
http://www.davidhannan.ca/

Cody E. Harjo

Alan Michelson
http://alanmichelson.com/

Skawennati
www.cyberpowwow.com
www.timetravellertm.com

Sarah Sense
www.sarahsense.com
www.weavingtheamericas.com
ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

Treaty of Echota
http://digital.library.okstate.edu/kappler/Vol2/treaties/che0439.htm

Trail of Tears

Cherokee Phoenix
http://www.cherokeePhoenix.org/